

From the Mayor...

April 3, 2015

I'm sure you have heard the term "regionalism". It is simply the combination of several cities, towns, and counties working together towards a cooperative economic development strategy.

The premise is that through the collaboration of sharing resources and assets, synergy will be created. Industry alignment, supply chain collaborations, workforce training, shared marketing and incentives, coordinated transportation connectivity, a variety of social and recreational amenities, and the availability of unique natural resources can collectively contribute to attain regional strength.

As a result, the benefit to the entire region will be more than the sum of its parts. One example could be the beneficial consideration regional transportation projects are given. A growing region might attract a particular non-stop route to and from the coast on a national airline. It could garner more favorable grant support for a regional road improvement like the US 30 limited access project. It might even attract a logistics node to better serve the rail freight needs of a region.

The State of Indiana has sparked the "regionalism" conversation over the past 6 months with its "Regional Cities" initiative. With funding incentives, the hope is that regions will come together and form redevelopment authorities to fund infrastructure projects. Those projects in turn stimulate economic development through public/private partnership investing in quality of place projects that improves livability to attract workforce. This ultimately stimulates industrial and population growth.

Successful regions with peer cities like Raleigh-Durham North Carolina and Waterloo-Cedar Rapids Iowa have been highlighted to exemplify success. More details for the Regional Cities initiative can be found at [indianaregionalcities.com](http://indianaregionalcities.com).

While "Regional Cities" is an admittedly fledgling project, it has focused local attention on the necessity to pool our assets in a regional context. An unsettled, globally shifting economy broadens the conversation. To benefit from regionalism, the organization of a productive region requires trust, common purpose, and consensus. What are we going to gain locally? Who are we going to align with? How will we benefit over the long term? What's the buy in?

As a city, whom do we align with? I think the obvious first step is to strengthen the alignment within our local community. Shared local purpose yields the primary level of regional strength. The redevelopment success of the Town of Winona Lake, the resurgence of Grace College, the focus of agribusiness in our outlying rural communities, and the magnificent lake country strengthens our regional appeal.

What regions then, give us better opportunity to capitalize our assets? Which media market serves us better, has better transportation connectivity, industry

compatibility, workforce distribution, shopping and entertainment venues, educational opportunities, etc. The list goes on and on. If you had to, which would you choose? South Bend? Fort Wayne? Are we in between two regional cities or are we our own “regional city”? I can tell you right now that there are many good local minds trying to answer those questions

Our community has much to offer. We will seek out what is best for our entire community.